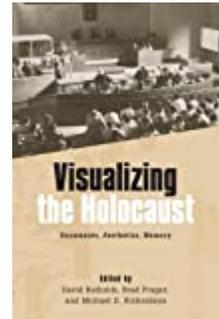# H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

David Bathrick, Brad Prager, Michael D. Richardson. *Visualizing the Holocaust: Documents, Aesthetics, Memory.* Rochester: Camden House, 2008. 336 S. $75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57113-383-0.

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A Valuable Collection

For the first volume in their new series, Gerd Gemünden and Johannes von Moltke could not have made a better choice. With twelve contributions and an agenda-setting introduction by David Bathrick, *Visualizing the Holocaust* offers innovative approaches to one of the most difficult issues in German film and visual culture–the problem of Holocaust representation– while at the same time expanding the range of questions and inquiries toward a decidedly European framework. Edited by Bathrick, Brad Prager, and Michael D. Richardson and based on a DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) Summer Seminar held at Cornell University, the anthology takes as its starting point the ongoing debates on the difficulties of Holocaust representation. Ever since Theodor Adorno's falsely understood dictum on the *Bilderverbot* and the subsequent statements by Saul Friedländer, Dominick LaCapra, Geoffrey Hartmann, and others, the Holocaust has served as a test case for the unknowability of the past, the unrepresentability of a unique genocide, and the ethically and aesthetically appropriate modes for writers, artists, filmmakers, and scholars trying to negotiate these prohibitions, expectations, and aporias. In recent years, a growing interest has developed in the special role of film, photography, and the visual arts in organizing the memory and commemoration of the Holocaust. At the same time, scholars have begun to challenge many of the underlying assumptions that have informed earlier studies on Holocaust film (such as those by Ilan Avisar and Annette Insdorf). Overall, greater attention has been paid to the role of photography, initiated by Marianne Hirsch in her work on post-memory, as well as the larger cultural field established by monuments, exhibition, and commemorative practices (as in the work of James Young). *Visualizing the Holocaust* must therefore be read in context of a number of publications that include the very similarly conceived *Nachbilder des Holocaust* (2006), edited by Inge Stephan and Alexandra Tacke; the more didactic *The Holocaust and the Moving Image* (2005), edited by Toby Haggith and Joanna Newman; and Terri Ginsburg's theoretically provocative *Holocaust Film: The Politics and Aesthetics of Ideology* (2007).

Like these studies, *Visualizing the Holocaust* contributes to the long overdue shift from mainstream feature films to the entire range of audio-visual practices, including documentaries, and a related shift from a literary and/or narrative paradigm to one informed by the complex relationship between cognition and affect organized by the image. The tension between a critique of ocularcentrism and the understanding of the image as trace is central to all contributions. Responding to the special claims on the real made by documentaries, Eric Kligermann thus rereads Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* (1955) through Paul Celan's translation of Cayrol, whereas Darcy Buerkle analyzes *The Specialist* (1999) on the Eichmann trial for its use of onscreen and off-screen affect. The problematic status of perpetrator photographs is taken up by Prager in his discussion of photography in W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2001) and *The Emigrants* (1992) and by Daniel Magilow in a piece on the Warsaw ghetto photographs by Heinrich JÃ¶st. Writing on a closely related topic, Jaimey Fisher discusses the intersection of public and private memory explored by PÃ©ter ForgÃ¡cs in his experimental reworking of home movies in *Free Fall* (1996). Several contributors problematize Holocaust visualization within a larger cultural context: through a rereading of Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum as an "architecture of trauma" via Hirsch's notion of post-memory (Elke Heckner); a deconstruction of the iconic image of Anne Frank within contemporary U.S. media culture (L. J. Nicoletti); and the discursive function of the *Bilderverbot* in the German reception of *Schindler's List* (1993) (Karyn Ball). Two contributors focus on the theoretical challenges posed by Holocaust representation via the extensive debates on Claude Landsman's work, with Sven-Erik Rose deconstructing the function of Auschwitz in Fredric Jameson, Jean-FranÃ§ois Lyotard, and Georges Didi-Huberman and with Michael D'Arcy uncovering the contradictions in Landsman's own approach to the image in *Shoah* (1985). Last but not least, articles by David Brenner and Michael Richardson take on the question of humor and satire: Brenner through a discussion of *Train of Life*'s (1998) tragicomic Holocaust cinema and Richardson through a discussion of humor and performativity in select Holocaust comedies.

Read as part of a collaborative, dialogic project, the anthology suggests two lines of argumentation, though not necessarily the ones identified in the introduction. First, despite the initial calls for taboo breaking, *Visualizing the Holocaust* ends up validating the high culture tradition in the filmic and photographic representation of the Holocaust. The contributions by Brenner and Richardson are the only ones that address head-on the kitschification and banalization of the Holocaust and the hidden affinities of the Holocaust film with Hollywood genre cinema (such as horror film). Second, and not surprisingly given that most of the contributors are Germanists, the anthology limits itself to the European perspective (exception: Nicoletti) without making this an integral (and potentially important) part of its overall conception. For obvious reasons, Holocaust representations serve fundamentally different functions in Europe (especially Germany) and the United States; but addressing this difference would have meant reading Holocaust visualization in relation also to a uniquely European tradition of art cinema and historical commemoration. Notwithstanding these minor points, the anthology represents an important contribution from the European perspective, and, as that, it succeeds beautifully. One can only hope that Camden House decides to issue a paperback edition so that the book may be used in university courses.

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